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THE INDONESIAN HISTORY AS *OPIUM* FOR THE EAST TIMORESE AND INDONESIAN PEOPLES

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MARX once labelled religion as opium for the people. The validity of that claim is still debatable -- especially looking at the role of the Catholic church in East Timor. However, analogous with Marx's claim, the ruling elite in Indonesia has for twenty years intoxicated the Indonesian people to accept East Timor's annexation, by using five important historical myths.

The first myth -- which grew out of Indonesia's long history of anti-colonial struggles against European colonizers -- is that colonialism is a European monopoly, which has extended globally to become a Western monopoly. Hence, the Indonesian regime has quite successfully sold the idea to its subjects that the international campaign to enable the East Timorese people to exercise their right to self-determination is a "Western" -- thus, "neo-colonial" -- plot against Indonesia. Seen from that perspective, Portugal's role as the major spokeperson for the East Timorese people in the international arena, tends to be counter-productive in building up support within Indonesia for the East Timorese cause.

The second myth is that only Islam can become the motivating force for independence movements. Although strong support exists in Indonesia for Islamic-inspired independence movements in Palestine and Bosnia, no similar connection has been made between Catholicism and the independence movement in East Timor. This misunderstanding grew out of Indo-nesia's anti-colonial experience, where Christianity was associated with the Western colonizer and Islam with (non-Western) colonized people.

The third myth is that the Tetun-speaking kingdom of Waihale in West Timor, once united the whole island of Timor under its sphere of influence, which justifies a similar unification of the island within the Indonesian Republic. This myth, which has often been reiterated by Indonesian social scientists, suffers from several important flaws.

First, even if it were true that a certain kingdom once united the whole island, does the population of that island at this present point of time, hundreds of years later, still want to be united under the administration of the Indonesian Republic, which is not the same as the old Waihale kingdom? Secondly, even the validity of that historical claim can be debated from various angles. If it was really true that the Tetun speaking kingdom of Waihale did unit the whole island, why is it that Tetun has not even become the *lin-*

gua franca of West Timor, where Atoni is much more widely spoken? And even in East Timor, Tetun was only one of the more than thirty vernaculars in East Timor, prior to the arrival of the Portugues?

In addition, the popularity of Tetun, especially its Dili variety, Tetun Praca, in later years, have to be attributed to more contemporary factors than the influence of Waihale. First, the Portuguese's decision to turn it into a *lingua franca* for the non-assimilated natives, the Maubere, to distinguish the 'uneducated' people from the *assimilados* and*mesticos* . Second, during the independence struggle against the Indonesian occupation forces, the literacy training program of Fretilin and Falintil guerilleros increased the popularity of spoken *and* written Tetun in many remote places in East Timor. Third, the decision of the Diocese of Dili to turn to Tetun as its liturgical language instead of Indonesian, after Portuguese was forbidden by the Indonesian occupation forces, gave another push to Tetun. Finally, the decision of the Indonesian education administration to begin teaching Tetun in the elementary schools popularized Tetun even further. So, all these facts easily shatter the myth about the role of the Waihale kingdom of unifying the whole island as indicated by the popularity of Tetun in East Timor.

The fourth myth is that Fretilin was a communist party, hence, its domination in East Timor should be prevented by assisting the East Timorese to liberate themselves from those "communists" and their Portuguese supporters in the armed forces. This is probably one of the most popular myth in Indonesia, which has helped the Indonesian regime to obtain the blessings from the Indonesian Moslems and Christians to invade the eastern half of the island in late 1975. Later on, because of this anti-communist hang over, by repeatedly portraying the resistance in East Timor as being identical with Fretilin, which is not the case anymore, the Indonesian regime has been successful in alienating it with the more progressive Indonesian forces who come from religious backgrounds and are thus still more sensitive to the specific encounters with communism in Indonesia (which in itself need to be reflected on).

Let me now crack this fourth myth. First of all, as a liberation front, Fretilin brought together all factions which wanted immediate independence as well as a radical overhaul of the East Timorese society from the colonial remnants. Certainly, there were Marxists among them, just as there were church-going Catholics, Moslems of Arabic descent, Chinese followers of Confucius, practitioners of the indigenous, natural belief systems. But they were predominantly unified by strong nationalistic feeling and a rudimentary *Maubere* ideology, which drew some parallels with the late President Soekarno's *Marhaenism* .

After UDT left the pro-independence coalition and eventually collaborated with the Indonesian invaders, Fretilin was the only pro-independence party

left. So, this historical accident, as well as its close association with the liberation movements in Africa, led Fretilin to declare East Timor's independence on 28 November 1975, in the form of a single-party state. This act, however, has already been changed by Xanana Gusmao in the party's first congress in the mid 1980s, after recovering from the heavy blows by the Indonesian armed forces from 1975 to 1981. Fretilin has adopted a multi-party system, and even initiated the formation of CNRM, the multi-party umbrella organization, and abolished the old Fretilin greetings with a Marxist ring, *camarada* , and introduced the greeting with a more friendly and humanist ring, *companhero/a*.

However, even if Fretilin was a communist party, that could not justify Indonesia to invade and occupy East Timor. Because, following on the same logic, a future more left-leaning Indonesian regime has also no right to invade Singapore under the pretext of preventing "capitalist viruses" from infecting Indonesia.

The five myth is that the East Timorese people themselves had asked to be integrated with Indonesia, epitomized by the so-called "Balibo declaration" which was actually orchestrated by Indonesian intelligence agents in Penida View Hotel, Bali. Hence, the East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao called it the "Bali-*bohong* declaration", since it was not formulated and signed by East Timorese leaders in Balibo, East Timor, but by Indonesians in Bali.

Hence, in order to liberate the East Timorese people, the Indonesian people themselves also need to be liberated from their own history, a history which has been falsely interpreted to deny another people's right to self determination and independence. By being prisoners of that false interpretation, even many Indonesian democrats who are fighting against the present regime have shown very little sympathy with the East Timorese cause.

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